

**Amendments to the Claims**

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

**Listing of Claims**

1. (currently amended) A tracheostomy tube comprising:  
a hollow tubular body having a proximal end portion, a distal end portion and a curved portion intermediate said proximal and distal end portions; and  
a flange situated at said proximal end portion, said flange being capable of selective attachment to said ~~proximal portion and detachment~~ tubular body and removal therefrom, said flange extending radially from said proximal end portion when attached thereto.
2. (canceled)
3. (previously presented) The tracheostomy tube of claim 1, wherein said flange is attachable to said tube by a snap-fit.
4. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 3, wherein said hollow tubular body includes a collar at its proximal end, said collar having a groove, and wherein said flange includes a cut-away portion, said cut-away portion and said groove being cooperatively sized and shaped to mate when said flange is attached to said tube.
5. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 4, wherein at least one snap is provided at said cut-away portion to provide said snap-fit with a receptacle on said tubular body.
6. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 4, wherein said collar is integral with the hollow tubular body.
7. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 4, wherein said collar includes one or more barbs for attaching the collar to said hollow tubular body.
8. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 1, further comprising a removable inner cannula insertable in said hollow tubular body.
9. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 1, wherein said hollow tubular body includes an inflatable cuff surrounding a part of said distal end portion, said

tracheostomy tube further comprising an inflation line connecting said cuff to a source of an inflation fluid.

10. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 9, wherein said inflation line is connected to said hollow tubular body along a length of said body, at least a portion of said inflation line being selectively peelable from said hollow tubular body.

11. (original) The tracheostomy tube of claim 10, wherein said hollow tubular body is trimmable along a trim line to reduce the length of said body, and said inflation line is peelable at least to a point below said trim line.

12. (currently amended) An insertion device comprising a tracheostomy tube and a loading dilator, the tracheostomy tube having a longitudinal bore and a tapered distal tip; the loading dilator having a larger-diameter stepped proximal portion and a smaller diameter distal portion extending from said larger diameter proximal portion, said smaller diameter distal portion having a generally cylindrical profile and having a tapered distal end, the smaller-diameter distal portion being sized to be insertable through the longitudinal bore of said tracheostomy tube such that said tapered distal end extends axially beyond the tapered distal tip of the tracheostomy tube, the tracheostomy tube having a proximal end and further comprising a stop portion at said proximal end for engaging a distal portion of the larger-diameter stepped portion of the dilator to limit axial movement of the loading dilator through the tracheostomy tube.

13. (original) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said stop portion comprises a collar provided at said proximal end of said tracheostomy tube.

14. (original) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said stop portion comprises a larger-diameter proximal end portion of the tracheostomy tube.

15. (previously presented) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said tapered distal end of said dilator is complementary to the tapered distal tip of the tracheostomy tube such that a generally smooth conical insertion tip is defined thereby.

16. (original) The insertion device of claim 15, wherein said generally smooth conical insertion tip has a profile sufficient for dilating an opening in the body of a patient for insertion of said tracheostomy tube.

17. (original) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said larger-diameter stepped proximal portion of the dilator comprises a gripping surface.

18. (original) The insertion device of claim 17, wherein said gripping surface is formed from one or more polymers.

19. (original) The insertion device of claim 17, wherein said gripping surface is formed from a member selected from the group consisting of lower durometer urethanes, thermoplastic rubbers, thermoplastic elastomers and non-thermoplastic elastomers.

20. (original) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said dilator larger-diameter stepped proximal portion and smaller diameter distal portion comprise integral molded components.

21. (original) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said larger-diameter stepped proximal portion of said dilator includes a longitudinal passageway, and a portion of said smaller diameter distal portion is securely received within said longitudinal passageway.

22. (currently amended) A device for percutaneous insertion into the trachea of a patient, comprising:

a tracheostomy tube having a longitudinal passageway therethrough, said tracheostomy tube having a distal end portion percutaneously insertable into said trachea and a proximal end portion exterior to the trachea when said distal end portion is inserted; said tracheostomy tube further having a radially extending flange capable of selective attachment to and ~~detachment~~ removal from said ~~proximal end portion of the~~ tracheostomy tube after said distal end portion has been inserted into the trachea;

a dilator positionable within said longitudinal passageway of said tracheostomy tube for dilating an opening in said trachea for insertion of said tracheostomy tube; and

a locking assembly for locking the tracheostomy tube to the dilator during insertion of said tracheostomy tube into the trachea.

23. (original) The device of claim 22, wherein said locking assembly comprises a securement member associated with the dilator, said securement member engageable with a complementary member on said tracheostomy tube.

24. (original) The device of claim 23, wherein said locking assembly further comprises a stop member disposed on an outer surface of said dilator, said stop member engaged with said dilator such that substantial axial movement of said stop

member along said dilator is prevented when an axial force is applied to said stop member, said stop member positioned on said outer surface and engageable with said securement member and said complementary member for preventing excess penetration of the tracheostomy tube into the trachea.

25. (original) The device of claim 24, wherein said stop member comprises an annular ring integral with said dilator.

26. (original) The device of claim 24, wherein said stop member comprises an annular ring fitted on the outer surface of said dilator.

27. (original) The device of claim 24, wherein said complementary member comprises a collar integral with said tracheostomy tube.

28. (original) The device of claim 24, wherein said complementary member comprises a collar fitted on an exterior surface of said tracheostomy tube.

29. (original) The device of claim 24, wherein said securement member comprises a cap member having one or more screw threads engageable with said complementary member for locking said tracheostomy tube to said dilator.

30. (previously presented) A method of inserting a tracheostomy tube into the trachea of a patient, the method comprising:

providing a tracheostomy tube comprising a hollow tubular body having a longitudinal passageway therethrough, said tubular body having a distal end portion for insertion into the trachea, and a proximal end portion exterior to the trachea when the distal end portion is inserted, said tubular body further having a curved portion intermediate said proximal and distal end portions;

inserting said distal end portion of said tubular body into said trachea;  
trimming an excess portion of said proximal end portion of said tubular body; and  
engaging a flange with said tracheostomy tube at said proximal end portion of said tubular body following insertion of said distal end portion.

31. (original) The method of claim 30, wherein said flange is attached to a collar, said collar being connected to said proximal end portion.

32. (previously presented) The insertion device of claim 12, wherein said loading dilator has a central lumen extending substantially therethrough.